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### Chapter 12: Drinking, in Intimacy and Community in a Changing World: Sikaiana Life 1980-1993

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## XII

**THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF DRINKING:  
Alcohol in Sikaiana Life**

**Readers should note that Robert Sisilo and Priscilla Taulupo told me in 2019 that the drinking is not nearly as heavy as it was during my stays in the 1980s. It is not as public and drinking groups are not as large, although there is still some heavy drinking.**

On my last night on Sikaiana in 1983 I was drinking fermented coconut toddy with Uriel and a few others outside his cookhouse. We drank all night and into the next morning. The *Belama* was due to arrive later in the day. We didn't have a large amount of toddy, but enough to keep us going through the night. It was getting to be the time in the morning when the rooster crows frequently, and the sky lightens a bit. The Sikaiana measure the nights by the crowing of roosters; towards dawn they crow more frequently. (One of Frank Saovete's songs describe the crowing of a rooster at dawn during the last few dances at a goodbye party.) It was time of morning called *sseni* when one can make out the outline of individuals going about chores but not recognize them.

There is a path that goes across the soccer field in front of the school, and then turns into the undergrowth just before a little incline leading down to the shore away from areas in front of houses. I went to relieve myself in the relative privacy along that shore. As I walked back, it occurred to me that this could be the very last time that I would be on Sikaiana, and the very last time that I would be on this particular path, used by lovers to meet at night, by people on their way to work during the day, and by drinkers such as myself who were wandering about. I thought back to the time when I had just arrived two and half years earlier: a young man and I had walked this path to where he turned off to meet with his lover. The following year, they had married. The path took me past some coconut trees over the use of which I had once heard Fane and a young male member of her lineage quarrel. Fane's age and knowledge was matched against the fact that as a male he should have more authority in managing land. Then I walked past Fane's house-- she had died a few months before-- across the path which led to the priest's house, behind the church, and finally back to Uriel's house where we were drinking. The path, which had been so mysterious two and half earlier, now seemed alive with meanings and uses, both personal and shared.

Somewhere along the walk, I started crying. I arrived back where I had been drinking and tears falling, I rejoined the toddy drinkers. One of the older men, more experienced after a life time of moving from place to place, was practical about my emotions, saying, *ka hano, ka hano*, "you go, you go." More tears came to my eyes as I looked at him. I thought that I would never see him again and his mannerisms, nor hear his matter-of-fact manner.

It was becoming light. An adolescent girl came out of her house to start the fire for the morning meal. The sun still had not risen, but there was light enough for her to see my tears. She laughed at me, and then called out "*A Bili ku tani*," ("Billy is crying"),

partly in wonderment and partly in the form teasing that Sikaiana often direct to displays of emotion, especially sentimental ones. More tears came that I might never again hear such teasing, nor watch people go about their simple, daily tasks of starting a fire to heat water.

Everywhere I looked it seemed that I saw something which had become part of my life over the past few years, but would never see again: the kettle with a spout made crooked from a drunken quarrel: Uriel's impassive face as he inhaled a cigarette; the coconut leaf torches his daughter used for starting the fire; the scattered coconut shells used for cooking; the stick tobacco with a knife nearby; a pile of rotting leaf mats; the early morning crow of roosters. I might never again have to wait my turn to drink the harsh, sour toddy. I couldn't stop crying.

I am not an especially emotional person. I had never cried before on Sikaiana, although there were times when I had drunk much more toddy. Later that morning, after I had slept for a few hours, I was more composed as I prepared to take my belongings to the boat. I was sad, but I had to get ready for a boat and felt chastened by the direct midday tropical light.

I suppose my tears, nostalgia and feelings of closeness to Sikaiana can be attributed to, as the Sikaiana so often put it, "something to do with drunkenness." They explain that drunken behavior is different from sober and more ordinary behavior. The Sikaiana get emotional when drunk. Their joking is more dramatic; their anger is volatile; their friendliness is less inhibited; and their sorrows and disappointments become much more evident. And the Sikaiana also say that sometimes drunken people behave in ways which reflect feelings that exist but are not expressed when sober.

## **TODDY**

Everyday, in the morning and evening, Sikaiana men climb coconut trees to collect coconut sap. The shoots of the trees are bound and then cut on the end with a very sharp knife. Throughout the day, coconut sap runs down into a bottle which hangs below the shoot. The shoots must be cut twice a day or the sap will coagulate and stop running. If the person tending the tree cannot cut it, he must find someone else who will or he will no longer be able to collect the sap.

When coconut toddy is first taken from a tree it is very sweet; some people like to drink it that way. When cooked, the coconut toddy can be made into a syrupy molasses which tastes good poured on bananas or bread. Sikaiana children like to sweeten rice with it. Laumani usually kept me supplied with a bottle of this molasses, which I used for snacks with bread or crackers. Sometimes, the Sikaiana mix the syrup with water to make a sweet tasting drink. If cooked enough, the molasses can be hardened into candy.

Most toddy is not collected for these purposes, rather it is collected to be fermented. Left in a glass container, the toddy will turn into an alcoholic beverage. After about a day or so, it will no longer be sweet, but have a kind of bubbly taste which I found pleasant. After several days, when the toddy is fully fermented, it acquires a

harsh, sour taste. By adding new sap every day, the fermentation process is delayed and the amount of toddy increased. Normally, it takes about three or four days to ferment several gallons of toddy. The toddy is about 6% alcohol.

Drinking is a special, but also integral event in Sikaiana life. On the atoll its regulation is coordinated with Sikaiana's religious and ceremonial life. All Christian holidays are celebrated by drinking toddy. Marriage exchanges are organized around toddy drinking on Sikaiana and beer drinking in Honiara. In Honiara, major fundraising events include the sale and consumption of alcohol.

Drinking, like all other human activities, is shaped by social conventions. On Sikaiana, there are times and occasions for drinking. There are standardized rules of etiquette for joining a group and distributing the toddy. Drunken behavior, both festive and disruptive, is to a large extent standardized and recurrent, although it is different from sober behavior and in some respects subverts sober expectations.<sup>i</sup>

### **Regulations and Occasions**

The process for fermenting toddy was brought by Kiribati (Gilbertese) castaways who arrived on Sikaiana in the late 19th century. It is likely that the Gilbertese learned the fermentation process from European or Malay beach combers in the early 19th century. On Sikaiana, the collection of sap and preparation of toddy is done by men. Usually one man collects and ferments toddy by himself, although sometimes several men cooperate. When women drink, they must acquire their toddy from a male, often from a close male relative, or in return for some service, such as making mats.

Other fermented beverages are sometimes made, including pineapple wine, and sugar with yeast. Wine, beer and whisky are brought from Honiara, but they are a luxury on Sikaiana because of their high cost. Some people claim that occasionally they drink methylated alcohol, which is sold as a starting fluid for pressure lamps. However, during my stay, I never saw anyone drink it.

Drinking on the atoll is regulated by the local church and the major occasions for drinking are coordinated with the church calendar. During my stay in 1980-1983, women were allowed to drink only on special occasions, usually several days during the major Christian holidays. Men were free to drink at all times, except from Saturday morning until Sunday afternoon, when drinking would affect their sobriety at Confession or Sunday Communion. These regulations were enforced by the Sikaiana priest in consultation with the local church committee. Failure to comply with these church regulations resulted in temporary expulsion from Holy Communion and a public confession before the offender was reinstated. With a very few exceptions, these regulations were obeyed.

For a period before my arrival in 1980, the atoll's women were completely prohibited from drinking at any time. They had lobbied successfully to be permitted to

drink on special occasions such as church holidays. Usually, these were two consecutive days so that the women can continue to drink from one day through the night to the following day. When I returned in 1987, the former priest had retired and was replaced by a new one. The new priest allowed men and women to drink whenever they pleased including on Sundays.<sup>ii</sup>

Most women are more circumspect in their drinking than men. One time in 1981, the catechist allowed the women to drink on a special church holiday. None of the women joined in. Some told me that they felt it would be unseemly. In Honiara, where there are no restrictions on drinking, women do drink, sometimes heavily, but not as frequently or consistently as men.

The most dramatic occasions for drinking on Sikaiana are during the celebration of major holidays. These holidays include Christian holidays such as Christmas, Easter, New Year, the week devoted to St. Andrew, and some secular holidays such as Solomon Islands Independence Day. During Christian holidays all physical labor, other than what is necessary for daily maintenance, is prohibited for the week. People are expected to spend the week dancing, singing, feasting, playing games, and attending church services. Large amounts of toddy are fermented in preparation for these occasions. Most of the atoll's adult population joins in several large groups to drink, sing and dance. People move between these groups. Some men drink for most of the week, or at least the first two or three days. Increasing numbers of men tire of drinking as the week progresses, although they may start drinking again towards the end of the week when they have rested and more toddy has been fermented. Many Sikaiana people claim that festive occasions such as marriages cannot be fully enjoyed unless people are drinking. In 1980-83, people tried to plan marriages and bridewealth exchanges during these holiday weeks so that women could drink and fully enjoy the festivity.

Men and women often drink in separate groups; although as the drinking continues, men and women may join together. There are two commonly cited reasons for trying to separate the sexes when drinking. First, since they do not make their own toddy, women have a limited supply of it. If they allow the men to join their group, they reduce the amount of toddy they have during their rare opportunity to drink. Second, people claim that there is a greater likelihood of extra-marital sex when men and women are drinking together. On those occasions when young unmarried women are drinking in mixed company, there should be an elder, preferably sober, female relative nearby to act as a kind of chaperon.

Older and younger males often prefer to drink in separate groups. Older men fight less than younger men and are less likely to try to start quarrels when they are drunk. Moreover, older men prefer to sing traditional songs. Most young men do not know these songs and prefer to sing songs that are composed for the guitar. However, depending upon the supply and demand of toddy, there are frequent occasions when men of all ages drink together.

Generally, younger men are heavier drinkers than older men, and the life of many of the young unmarried men, *tamataane*, seemed to be largely concerned with

preparing and drinking toddy. There are a few mature men who are known for their constant drinking, for example, Tokulaa. I know two men who completely stopped drinking, and one young man who was unusual for never starting. There are a few men who only drink at the major festivities. But there are also some mature men who drink once or twice a week. Since people normally drink until the toddy is finished, a drinking session can continue overnight and, if the toddy lasts, continue for several days. The same person may vary in the frequency of his drinking. Sometimes, a man drinks two or three times every week for several consecutive weeks; then, the same man may go several weeks without drinking at all.

Among migrants living in Honiara, the frequency of drinking is limited by the availability of intoxicating beverages. People who own tracts of land with coconut trees, such as those living at Tenaru Beach outside of Honiara, collect and ferment their own toddy. Other people who live in towns must buy beer or liquor, both of which are expensive. During my stay, beer cost about US \$20 a case and a laborer earned about US \$100 a month. Although many Sikaiana people make more than a laborer's salary, buying liquor may prove to be quite expensive, especially given Sikaiana patterns of consumption, which do not encourage moderation. Drinking in towns occurs on holidays, at bridewealth exchanges, fundraising events, and more informally among smaller groups of friends on weekends. It is usually more limited in duration than on Sikaiana because of the expense and people's work schedules. Nevertheless, most important Sikaiana celebrations in Honiara, such as a marriage, holiday, and more recently, fundraising events include alcohol consumption.

### **Patterns of Participation and Distribution**

Toddy is served by pouring it from large glass containers into a small container such as a pitcher or tea kettle. (The large containers hold two or three gallons. They are hollow glass bowls used by commercial fishermen as buoys on nets and they drift to Sikaiana.) The toddy is poured from a pitcher or kettle into a serving glass, metal cup or coconut shell. Usually, the person who fermented the toddy is the one who distributes it. The distributor measures a portion into the cup or shell and then gives it to one person in the group. This person drinks the cup until it is empty, usually in one drink, and then returns the cup to the person who is distributing the toddy. Another portion of the same size is poured for the next person in the circle who is passed the cup. The cup continues to move around the circle until everyone in the group has had a turn. Then the distributor starts another round. Everyone should be given an equal amount to drink, although if a person arrives late, the distributor may offer him a larger portion so that the latecomer can catch up with the people who are already drinking. In larger groups, several cups are passed out simultaneously, but always in a roughly circular fashion so that everyone is given a turn and an equal amount to drink.<sup>iii</sup>

In deciding how much will go into each cup and how long to rest between rounds, the distributor has control over how quickly people become drunk. Sometimes, if the supply is limited or the distributor wishes to maintain a happy level of inebriation, he slows down the distribution. Other times, the distributor may hasten the pace and

increase the serving size in order to quicken and increase drunkenness. At one toddy drinking session that I attended, the distributor gave each person two full cups to be drunk immediately. After he went through the group several times in this manner, I became as drunk as I have ever been in my life. I was so drunk that after leaving the group for a short while to get some tobacco, I could not find my way back to it and simply went to bed.

Men pride themselves on how much they can drink. A person who refuses a round or retires early from a drinking session may be criticized and ridiculed, especially by younger bachelors. A person who frequently leaves a drinking group, perhaps claiming to go urinate or get some tobacco, will be accused of trying to miss a turn. People who pass out or slacken in their drinking are ridiculed and insulted by being told to go to bed and sleep.

Sikaiana men do not like to eat until they have finished drinking. To some extent, this practice is followed as a matter of dietary preference. They do not like to drink on a full stomach. After three years on Sikaiana, I acquired this habit and for several years I refused food when I was drinking at parties back in the United States. They also find that not eating enhances the effect of the toddy. Further, there is a competitive aspect to not eating. A person who returns to drink after eating has recouped some of his strength and not proven his ability to drink large amounts of toddy. Moreover, some young men explained to me that after people miss a turn or eat, they have an unfair advantage over other drinkers if a fight breaks out.

Most Sikaiana people continue to drink without regard for their level of intoxication. Normally, drinking continues until the toddy runs out or a participant gives up from exhaustion. People drink through the night and well into the following day. On major holidays or when there is a very large supply of toddy, some people drink for several days and nights. People vomit, pass out, or leave to sleep for a few hours and, upon recovering, return to drinking. Sometimes, after a heavy night of drinking, the bodies of some of the collapsed participants are sprawled out along the main village path.

Sikaiana drinking groups are variable in size. At the major holidays, most of the atoll's adult population form one or two large groups. Usually, these groups break into smaller groups as the drinking progresses, although sometimes they will rejoin into a large group later on. Within a large group, several smaller conversation circles form, although they remain part of the entire group's distribution cycle. On other occasions, Sikaiana men drink in groups of five to ten people. Several different drinking sessions may be going on simultaneously at different locations. People move back and forth between these groups, depending upon their personal preferences. If one group's supply of toddy runs out, the participants often join other groups.

The Sikaiana are exclusively social drinkers: it is very, very rare to see anyone drinking alone except when everyone else in a drinking group has already passed out or left to go to sleep. Drinking, especially during the major holidays, is a public event. Participation usually is open to anyone and people often drink in places where

they can be seen by others walking along the main paths. Older people say that public drinking is a recent development. They claim that until after World War II, drinking took place in more private areas in the interior of the islet or inside houses, where the drinkers could not be seen by the public. At present, passersby are often greeted with calls to come drink. Even people who are involved in major land disputes or a public argument will encourage each other to join a drinking group. Drinking offers an important opportunity for adult men to spend time together in an informal and enjoyable setting.

### Deporment When Drinking

There are several conventions about drinking behavior which were explained to me when I first arrived on Sikaiana. Since emotions are volatile, no knives should be nearby. But knives are used for cutting stick tobacco and they were frequently nearby. Often these knives are the very sharp ones used for cutting the coconut sap. If a quarrel breaks out, cooler heads remove the knives. No one was wounded by a knife during my stay, although several beatings were severe. (In 1985, one young man living on Sikaiana stabbed himself to death with a knife while drunk.)

Another convention is that people should not discuss land tenure while drinking because land disputes are such a volatile and emotional issue. Nevertheless, when people are drunk, they are less inhibited, and it is at just such times that they argue and talk about land. So far as I know, none of these arguments directly resulted in court cases, although drunken arguments were often remarked upon as possibly leading to cases.

Finally, it was explained to me that whatever is said or happens during a drinking session has no relevance for relationships when people are sober. People argue, fight, or curse each other while drunk, but these should be forgotten when they are sober. As will be explained below, this convention is usually, but not always, followed.

The Sikaiana people say that they drink to be 'happy,' *hakahiahia*. Men will not sing or dance with enthusiasm, unless they have been drinking. (It was often hard for me to get good song recordings from the men because I had to wait until they were drunk enough to ease their inhibitions but not so drunk that they could no longer sing well.) Women do sing and dance without drinking, but they are more enthusiastic when they have been drinking. Drinking is considered necessary in order to participate with enthusiasm at festive events. Most young men do not participate in the *hula* dances with women unless they have been drinking. As already discussed, parents tried to arrange marriage exchanges on Sikaiana during the major holidays so that the women could join in the festivities and fully enjoy the occasion.

Intoxication often is festive. Besides singing and dancing, there are lively conversations, joking and laughter. People engage in humorous public displays. On one occasion, almost all the young men on the atoll shaved each other's heads to the skin. Some of the young men tried to run away and hide, but eventually were caught



and held down so that their hair could be shaved. Afterwards, these young men marched down the village path in a humorous imitation of soldiers or policemen, lining up in front of the courthouse's flagpole and saluting.

When drinking, people discuss personal matters that they are too embarrassed or inhibited (*napa*) to discuss when sober. These conversations concern misunderstandings, accusations of wrong-doings, land use, and potential marriages. Young unmarried males are said to 'show off' (*hakatanata*) when they are drinking. They shout, laugh and sing loudly, and fight in order to attract the attention of other people, especially young women. Drunken young men are more likely to make sexual advances. In six out of the nine marriages which took place during my stay in 1980-1983, the young man married his lover by taking her to live with him on a night when he had been drinking. In these cases, he remained with her on the next morning. It is difficult to imagine the romantic life of Sikaiana without the stimulus of alcohol.

Drinking is not only a festive activity. People also engage in destructive and anti-social behavior. Disruptive behavior is also described as a result of the fact that intoxicated people no longer feel any shame (*napa*). Sometimes, people disobey restrictions for interaction: they quarrel or speak rudely with in-laws; sons get into fist fights with their fathers; close kin fight with each other; some men beat their wives. Occasionally drunken men will walk around naked or defecate in public view. They may chase children, and if they manage to catch them, occasionally beat them. Drunken people are also more likely to break Sikaiana etiquette by asking others for tobacco or food. When sober they would never ask for these things out of fear that someone would criticize them for begging.

Physical fights are quite rare on Sikaiana when people are sober. However, intoxicated people, especially young males, fight with some regularity. These fights rarely result in serious injury, although they may result in broken bones, black eyes, and cuts. During my three-year stay, I am aware of two cases in which a beating was so severe that a person was incapacitated for longer than a few days. Usually, the fights start with a verbal quarrel and other people intervene to keep the people apart, or separate them shortly after the fight starts. Some young men develop reputations for constant fighting, while others very rarely get into fights.

Almost all intentional property destruction occurs when people have been drinking, usually in a display of anger. Most Sikaiana houses with masonite or wooden walls have holes in them from when they were punched by a drunken man. Sometimes, entire sections of a building are destroyed before anyone arrives to restrain the drunken person. Drunken people have smashed expensive tape-recorders, guitars, the glass containers that hold the toddy. They have axed a canoe, burned clothing, and slashed garden crops.

In talking about drunken behavior, Sikaiana people claim that all disruptive behavior which occurs when a person is drunk should have no effect on the sober relationships of those involved. Property destruction, improper behavior, and arguments are usually dismissed as simply due to drunkenness, without relevance for

the future social relationships of those involved, either when sober or drinking together. Such is often the case. The day after a series of drunken fights, I found the former combatants sitting together, joking about their fights, and referring to the wounds they had given each other as "medals."

In some instances, however, drunken behavior has implications for sober behavior. Despite what the Sikaiana say on this matter, I found it is more accurate to say that drunken behavior is examined in the context of an entire social relationship. In some cases, Sikaiana people claim that drunken behavior reflects those inner feelings of animosity that do not surface in ostensibly polite and sober social interaction. If hostile feelings surface when drunk, the behavior may have consequences for the relationship in sober interaction.

Intoxication does not exclude a person from being prosecuted for breaking local, provincial, national, or church laws. Many of the cases in local court stemmed from drunken activities such as fighting, public swearing, and a drunken man not working on public workdays. People are sometimes ashamed of their drunken behavior when they are sober. In several cases, young men on vacation left the atoll because they had caused considerable trouble when they were drunk. Sometimes, men avoid appearing in public after they have committed some especially shameful offense while drunk. One person completely stopped drinking after he had severely beaten a close relative, and throughout my stays in 1980-1983 and 1987, he did not drink at all.

Drunken behavior is sometimes erratic and seems uncontrollable. In many cases, however, this lack of self-control is more apparent than real. Most housing has been damaged by drunks, but during my stay no one touched the local church building. The priest's house was damaged only once, an action that some people considered to be virtual sacrilege. By and large, the priest's house escaped the destruction common for other houses. In the presence of a few influential men, such as the priest, Kilatu, and Saua, drunkards were usually, but not always, more circumspect in their behavior.

Although drinking is an integral and constant part of the ceremonial life of Sikaiana, there is a backlash of public opinion against drunken behavior. On Sikaiana, there are constant complaints that men fight too often, don't get their work done, don't participate in public projects, and don't provide food for their children because of their drinking. Women often make these complaints against men in general, and elder men make similar complaints about younger men. There is a distinction made between happy and joyful drinking on the one hand and drinking that is disruptive on the other. People often say that drinking should be 'good' (*laoi*) or 'happy' (*hakahiahia*) and there are frequent admonishments to "drink happily" without fights or property damage.

Regardless of these complaints, drinking is considered fun and even some of the most disruptive moments are later recounted as amusing when everyone is sober. Drinking behavior, along with food and gossip, is one of the most common subjects of ordinary daily conversation when people are sober.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, both the Protectorate administration and the missionaries tried to prohibit drinking and apparently had a few sporadic periods of success. Somewhat ironically, the success of the missionaries in recruiting Sikaiana students into their schools ultimately undermined their effort to control alcohol use on Sikaiana. The first missionaries on Sikaiana tried to enforce a ban on drinking (these were Solomon Island converts who were members of the Tasiu, Melanesian Brotherhood). In the 1930s, some young men returning from mission schools made it known that the Bible-- at least as interpreted by the Anglican missionaries of the Melanesian Mission-- did not prohibit drinking. Apparently, the missionaries teaching at the mission schools were not opposed to drinking, even drinking heavily. These missionaries were all from England, New Zealand or Australia. John Kilatu told me that he was one of those young men. Based upon discussions with informants, it seems clear that by the time of World War II, young unmarried men were drinking with regularity. Until fairly recently, people claim that there was no drinking at church sponsored festivals and Christian holidays. They recall that the week-long Christian holidays were devoted to enthusiastic participation in feasting, singing, and dancing. At present, the Sikaiana seem incapable of enjoying these festive occasions unless they are drinking.

More recently, people perceive that the level of drinking has increased and become more public and violent. Although it is difficult to evaluate the accuracy of these perceptions, they may reflect a change in demographic patterns in which more younger men have begun to reside on the atoll. One man claimed that while he was staying on Sikaiana in the late 1960s, there were hardly any young bachelors resident on the atoll and therefore much less drinking. At that time, almost every young man was living abroad, either at work or in school. In 1980-1983, there were always a group of ten to fifteen young bachelors, most of whose lives seemed to center around drinking toddy.

### **Drinking and Social Relationships**

Sikaiana drinking has its own organization and even much of the seemingly disorganized behavior can be understood in terms of its integration into Sikaiana social relations. Toddy drinking offers an opportunity to deviate from normal expectations, to do things that are not normally done. In fact, such occasions are not so unusual in social systems, and the very fact of their deviance from normal behavior can be explained in terms of their integration into the social system.<sup>iv</sup> Toddy drinking is an opportunity for participants to demonstrate that their social identities are not totally subsumed in the ostensible content of their sober social relationships. It also creates a setting or atmosphere with conviviality and lack of inhibition.

Sikaiana drinking is often a community event. Major holidays are celebrated with many people joining together for drinking. Holiday drinking on Sikaiana involves almost every adult resident. In Honiara, marriage exchanges and fundraising events bring together the majority of the Sikaiana people who live there. Drinking contributes to a sense of intimacy within the community by bringing together the Sikaiana people for participation in an activity which is special, close, and personal. On Sikaiana, there

are very few foreigners, so that drinking activities, including both those that are festive and those that are disruptive, involve only Sikaiana people. In Honiara, the large occasions for Sikaiana drinking, such as fundraising events and weddings, involve mostly the Sikaiana themselves. In planning fundraising events in Honiara, the organizing committees discourage the attendance of non-Sikaiana people. They claim that when drunk these people were too disruptive, although, in fact, it is hard to imagine that they are any more disruptive than some of the rowdier Sikaiana. Instead, I think that the disruptive activities are more tolerable for the Sikaiana if they are instigated by a Sikaiana person rather than an outsider who is unknown to the community. In this respect, disruptive drinking behavior builds upon and creates a more intimate sense of community because it is done by people who are known and their behavior is to some extent forgiven.

Although Sikaiana has become more involved in the multi-ethnic nation of the Solomon Islands, Sikaiana toddy drinking is focused upon the Sikaiana community as a distinct group within this larger polity. Festive, erratic and disruptive behavior is limited to the community. The degree to which drinking has become more public on Sikaiana, as is claimed by many Sikaiana, may reflect the redefinition of the total community as private in reference to the outside world.

The restrictions periodically placed on women's drinking reflect differences in role expectations in both traditional and contemporary society. As I explained earlier, Sikaiana men are oriented towards the outside world: the sea, fishing, fighting outside invaders, and traveling on long-distance voyages. Women are oriented towards domestic activities: child rearing and food gathering in the islet's interior. This distinction between outside and interior is reflected in the contemporary division of labor. At present, males are encouraged to continue their schooling for as long as possible and then to work for wages. Women are involved in wage labor less frequently than men. On Sikaiana, men hold most of the offices that interact with the outside world, including court justice, council member and Area Constable.

When men are drinking, women provide some stability to Sikaiana social life by doing their daily chores, looking after the children, maintaining the household, and trying to restrain excessive fighting. It seems reasonable to infer that the men's greater involvement in drinking is related to their greater involvement in the outside world. At the same time, women provide internal stability within Sikaiana society.

Drinking is also an opportunity for the Sikaiana to participate in an enjoyable secular activity. In the past 50 years, many traditional Sikaiana ceremonies and festivities have been discontinued or replaced by Western ones. Toddy drinking is another festive event that is "indigenous," although not traditional or Western. As an indigenous ceremony, it is distinctive from the introduced ceremonies, games and festivities that Sikaiana shares with the rest of the Solomon Islands, and indeed, a large part of the rest of the world. Toddy drinking is an opportunity for a person to take himself outside of his social system and social relationships. But the toddy drinker does so in a specific context that is defined by the community. The person who truly wants to leave the Sikaiana social system may do so in his normal relationships by not main-

taining kinship ties, refusing to foster any children, not participating in Sikaiana dances and sports, not contributing to fundraising collections, and marrying a person from a different ethnic group. Above all, the person who truly wants to leave the Sikaiana social system should not get drunk with other Sikaiana people because at these times he or she becomes accessible and intimate.

Toddy drinking has a contradictory integration into Sikaiana life. It distances people from normal expectations for behavior, but at the same time unites people and reinforces their sense of familiarity.

But the fact that drinking allows individuals to distance themselves from normal expectations also has its costs. Time is lost from working, fishing and planting. Drunkenness takes a toll in property damage. In Honiara, money is needed for food. Salaries are low, and beer is expensive. Drinking can be a significant drain on resources for a Honiara household. Sometimes, it has very destructive consequences for the careers of Sikaiana people working in Honiara. Some people steal money in order to drink. Others neglect their work. There are also social costs in quarrels, beatings and fights, despite Sikaiana claims that drunken behavior should be ignored.

Finally, there is another ominous aspect about present-day Sikaiana drinking. Many men claim that they cannot fully enjoy expressive activities, such as dancing and singing, unless they have been drinking. Drinking offers a way to re-enchant an increasingly instrumental and differentiated world but it also underscores a devaluation or at least re-evaluation of those expressive activities. The old rituals are no longer times of excitement as they were for Fane, rather they are *mea pio*, 'false', 'bullshit'. People remember celebrating festive occasions in song and dance for hours without drinking, but this is now becoming different. Drinking provides the necessary frame for community activities including weddings, fundraising events, and also for enjoying expressive activities including singing and dancing.

### **Expressive Culture and the Maintenance of Community**

Song composition and drinking reinforce a sense of community among the Sikaiana. Both of these activities were introduced into Sikaiana society: the technique for fermenting toddy was introduced in the late 19th century; playing the guitar was learned in the 1960s. Both have undergone substantial changes in evolving into their present-day forms. But they are clearly indigenous and in this sense that they are *Sikaiana* activities. Both activities involve intimacy and personal knowledge, and in this manner serve to preserve Sikaiana as a distinct community of people in a changing world.

Neither activity, however, is stable. Drinking has potentially disruptive consequences as a result of destruction and violence, and, among emigrants, the loss of money that is diverted to buy beer. Song composition and Western dancing styles are replacing the traditional songs and dances. But these new musical genres may be replaced by other regional musical traditions including the commercial rock music heard throughout the entire world.

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- i. General discussions about the alcohol use are found in Mandelbaum (1966), MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969). The reader is referred to Marshall (1979a) and (1979b) for both a general summary of drinking and an in-depth account of drinking in one society; see also Douglas (1987). It should be noted that anthropologists have been criticized for ignoring the detrimental effects of excessive drinking (Room 1984, see also Marshall 1982, Marshall and Marshall 1990, Ogan 1985). I have discussed Sikaiana drinking in a separate paper (Donner 1994).
- ii. In 1987, mature men and women who wanted to drink gathered together after the Sunday morning church service and drank. Younger men still were drinking frequently but the drinking seemed to be more subdued than in my previous stay in 1980-1983. Their diminished drinking, however, may have been due to the fact that Sikaiana had not fully recovered from the cyclone in 1986.
- iii. This feature of toddy distribution has similarities with traditional patterns of the distribution of kava, a drink which was often taken in many traditional Polynesian societies (see Lemert 1964).
- iv. See Turner 1969, Gluckman 1962. In this respect, Sikaiana toddy drinking has something in common with the phenomenon that Goffman (1961a) labeled as "role distance." According to Goffman, people display role distance in order to demonstrate that they have competencies and interests beyond the expectations for the particular role that they are performing. For example, Goffman describes children riding on a merry-go-round. Very young children must concentrate all their attention on riding. Older children display role distance by showing-off and performing tricks to demonstrate that, unlike the younger children, their competencies and identities are not totally subsumed by riding the merry-go-round. In another example, doctors in an operating room display role distance by cracking jokes to show that they have commitments and identities beyond that of "surgeon" or "intern." By showing our individuality we are really conforming, and such conformity is a social phenomenon subject to sociological analysis.

Unlike Goffman's concept of "role distance," the Sikaiana drinkers are not distancing themselves from a specific social role. Rather, they are distancing themselves from an entire set of expectations about behavior that is appropriate when sober.